

# **BIOGRAPHICAL FICTIONS ABOUT THE GREAT AMERICAN AUTHORS F. SCOTT FITZGERALD AND ERNEST HEMINGWAY**

**MARIJA KRSTeva**

<sup>1</sup>Лектор, Универзитет „Гоце Делчев” - Филолошки факултет,  
marija.krsteva@ugd.edu.mk

## **Abstract**

The biographical fictions about the great American authors F. Scott Fitzgerald and Ernest Hemingway present a specific postmodern genre. In this respect, many novels have been created dealing with their life or with a specific part of their life. The life stories of the two emblematic figures of American and European modernism are interweaved. Historical facts and references to modernism find their place in the contemporary postmodern world by rendering different meanings.

Key words: *Biographical fictions, Fitzgerald, Hemingway, postmodernism*

## **Introduction**

Biographical fictions delineate the connection between fiction/biography and autobiography both in terms of the author and the reader as participants in a wider social and historical context. They offer responses to the questions about the intricate interweaving between fact and fiction resulting in the future composition of the nature and possibilities of the novel. This process of framing and articulating lived experience is intended as a radically self-conscious rendering of the existential self mediated through language and inevitably affected by the subjectivity of the receiver. The authors' works and documented personal reflections are committed to presenting the lives of Fitzgerald and Hemingway in a specific way. These works of prose fiction exploit the ability of the novel to deliver satisfying narrative, be critically explored and work as typical historiographic metafiction. They dramatise key events in the apparently disparate lives of the two authors. To clarify the method of interpretation, some points of the postmodern poetic vein will be brought up in light. In the

postmodern literary text, the idea of originality and authenticity is undermined and parodied. Postmodern literary works do not pretend to be new and original but uses the old literary forms, genres, and kinds of literature and art such as kitsch, quotation, allusion and other means to recontextualize their meaning in a different linguistic and cultural context. They aim to show a difference between the past and present as well as between the past and present forms of representation as was mentioned in famous John Barth's essay "The Literature of Exhaustion" in which he points out "an exhaustion" of old forms of art and suggests a creative potential of the use of old forms, genres and styles.

### **The biofictions and postmodernism**

Postmodern authors intentionally build the meaning by using the old forms and genres deliberately turning to plagiarism, kitsch, false or pretended quotations from well-known literary and other texts. Plagiarism is not meant to steal the authors' ideas but to evoke parody effect and ironic distance from these texts. The idea is creative reuse and recontextualisation of already existing texts by means of linguistic and textual play. The postmodern play allows for presentation of facts taken out of context which can in turn be manipulated by not allowing an alternative view of the same event. This leads to a significant aspect of postmodern culture and the vision of the world the postmodern literature often formally expresses and thematizes, that is a manipulation through the overlapping of the fact and fiction, reality and fantasy (Kušnir: 2011 Chapter 3). Another aspect is radical plurality and relativism which is associated with a distrust to the possibility of reason to understand and explain the world either objectively or subjectively to any unified visions of the world, to any eternal truths any unifying concept of truth. Radical plurality manifests itself not only in depiction of formerly marginalized and outcast characters but also in the use of multiple, often alternative or overlapping narrative voices, offering the version of reality and vision of the world which is equal to the other voice's interpretation in the use of different genres and styles typical of other kinds of literature and genres (detective story, pornography, love story, essay, diary, cookery book, recipe, letter, newspaper) but each of which contributes to the stylistic hybridity and mixing of

genres in the literary text. (Kušnir: 2011 Chapter 3). In writing biofictions, plurality is additionally visible from the further genre divisions of different novels that appear to deal with one and the same person in history. The division appears after the hybridization. As a result this deliberate breaking of the rules of genre conventions with literary works evocation of public figures is metafictional. It can be said that all postmodern texts initially use and imitate the genres of popular literature (thriller, detective, love story, horror, pornography, historical romance, sci-fiction and others), myths, classical literary texts or important religious texts, as their pretexts which are further modified. In questioning their fictional status they are metafictional. They refer to the principals of their construction by using various techniques and narrative devices. A simple understanding of metafiction is that of a fiction about fiction but postmodern fictional works turn out to be far more than only about fiction. The biographical facts become the means then for metafictional transformation into a postmodern novel which can further be represented in modern media or film. At the same time, by using a realistic form, modernist characters such as Hemingway and Fitzgerald, their fictional characters and the setting and sensibility are transformed into postmodern characters through the use of contrast, irony and paradox showing a difference between the past and present sensibility and forms of art. Intertextuality, however, is one of the most important aspects of a postmodern literary work closely connected to metafiction. Broadly speaking, intertextuality expresses a connection between the texts through various devices and techniques. Julija Kristeva places intertextuality as text's openness to various voices and interpretation and understands a literary text as part of other literary texts in the history of literary tradition. Thus, the idea of authorship is undermined – the text is not a product of an author, but exists within specific literary and cultural contexts and thus is open to various understandings and interpretations.

The use of postmodern parody, pastiche and radical irony is another aspect to be considered in this respect. Postmodern parody was theorized especially by Linda Hutcheon's *A Theory of Parody* (1985). Postmodern parody is not to mock the parodied author or style for its own sake, but his parody lacks this mocking, ridiculing

aspect and by using irony it emphasizes a difference between the past forms of art and sensibilities, a distance between past and present. This critical aspect, in Hutcheon's view, manifests itself especially in the use of irony. It is often difficult to identify irony within parody in postmodern literary texts since they are often closely connected and even inseparable. By re-writing, transforming and changing the motifs and styles from the parodied literary works, postmodern parody gives an alternative vision of reality as depicted in traditional literary works or through traditional narrative styles and techniques. This alternative is not aimed to be an official alternative to real history, but a playful and artistic reconsideration and relativisation of it. (Kušnir: 2011 Chapter 3). Therefore, many postmodern authors parody histories, religious books, biographies of authors, myths, works of traditional and popular literature etc. These prove essential in the creation of postmodern literature. Postmodernists are free to make a choice diachronically and synchronically between the different texts.

Biography has become tethered to documentary records which as such have become privileged as sources of knowledge. However, knowledge so conceived is not only limited to the types of documentary records available but reified taking on authority which excludes or marginalizes knowledge in other forms. Nevertheless, the field of biography is now shared with a range of other ideas on how a life story can be told. Certain features might be agreed upon and used by biographers as guiding lines, but choices or vantage points are always different. The biographical materials can be composed and combined in a variety of ways, there is no single pathway which can be followed or prescribed. (Vicars, James *Ethical Imaginations: Refereed Conference Papers of the 16th Annual AAWP Conference*, 2011) At a more fundamental level it reflects a forming, transforming and creative process which is bringing the story into being. Biography is the result of telling a story and being aware of this helps authors explore them more fully. The life story is created from the combination of what is accepted as shared knowledge and from what is held personally. It is a process of mediating factual, non, or quasi factual knowledge on people's lives. It might include speculations, rumor, unconscious biases and conscious judgments, gossip,

explanatory stories instructs and even silences gaps and more different contextual information. They all add up to the process of coloring the material for storytelling.

The new shape that is created in this process incorporates and transcends both factual and fictive elements. In this process facts are ascribed the same status as the fictive elements. In return it can be argued that facts are themselves only stories, constructs with a certain assumed authority or texts constructed from various constructs. Rendering the content sensible and providing opportunities for storytelling in a biographical context incorporates subjective or personal choice either transparently or not. The notions of story does not arrive innocent of the connotations of discourses of family, society, gender, power, criticism etc. It ranges from the highly factual to highly speculative. (Vicars, James *Ethical Imaginations: Refereed Conference Papers of the 16th Annual AAWP Conference*, 2011) The biographical fictions about F. Scott Fitzgerald and Ernest Hemingway go beyond the mythologizing of the public and private figures of the two authors. They are trying to create true, multifaceted and multicolored narrative of the beginning years of Hemingway and Fitzgerald in Paris and the French Riviera. The epic encounter of the two most glorious American authors of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is the story about the two couples, Fitzgerald and his wife Zelda Sayre and Hemingway and his first wife Hadley Richardson. Their great friendship set by admiration, jealousy and liquor is underlined by a mixture of literary scholarship, history and gossip. The glamorous lives of the two American expatriates in the city of lights recount a modernism story about the Jazz Age and the Lost Generation. They meet in Paris where the more famous F. Scott Fitzgerald introduced novice writer Hemingway to Gertrude Stein. These particular years have become as emblematic as the whole Paris and America themselves. Those were years full of complexities involving the writers themselves with their successes and insecurities, loves and losses intensely affecting their relationship. The glory and pain of a writing life and the rise and fall of great literary friendship is the cast of the two biofictions: *The Paris Wife* (2011) and *Z: A Novel of Zelda Fitzgerald*. Paula McLaine's *The Paris Wife* centers in the first of Hemingway's four wives, Hadley Richardson, during the 1920s when he was writing his first novel, the roman a clef *The Sun Also Rises*. Papa

is also falling in love with her chick friend Pauline Pfeiffer, who will become the second Mrs. Hemingway. Fowler concentrates on Zelda, illuminating the hard-partying Jazz age flapper, Southern belle, unfulfilled artist and in the end, mental patient. (Kevin, USA today: 2015) In many biofictions, often real historical characters meet with fictional characters or the characters from different historical periods meet in the fictional present, or real historical figure is depicted in the fictional situation which causes an ontological issue. These characters and worlds often merge and express uncertainty, relativity and confusion. It evokes a metafictional effect implying the idea that the literary work is also a work on the working of language in a literary work. The idea is that the language is not a self-enclosed system dependent on the context and its use in particular situations and the language is thus presented as unstable relative and manipulated. (Kušnir: 2011 Chapter 3). In these particular biofictions on Fitzgerald and Hemingway, the mixture of different historical periods with the fictional present does not create ontological issue or confusion, but the periods in which the events take place are rendered straightforward and in accordance with the character's time of living. This rendition, however, doesn't appear as straightforward at all points, again revealing their metafictionality. It depends on the authors' inclinations and emphasis in the creative process. For that purpose in both of the novels in question, the stories remain faithful to their historiographic nature as metafictions despite the different subject matter and the shared historical events. The inclinations can be traced from the authors' interviews and critical reception as they are result of what they hold personally and as writers. The characters' search, however, often becomes symbolic search for meaning, objectivity and truth which can never be achieved and which manifests itself within the allegorical framework. The symbolic quest and meaning are disseminated throughout the text and finally pass into postmodern allegory within which the following issues are treated: the relationship between the author, the literary work and the reader, between life and art, a difference between real experience and its artistic (linguistic representation), the nature of reality and fiction, that is ontological issues, such as the nature and the process of creative writing. In postmodern literary work, a mimetic, realistic representation often overlaps with fiction, fantasy, dreams and sometimes

hallucinations and in difference from modernist literary works, it is difficult to distinguish between these spheres and ontological levels. (Kušnír: 2011 Chapter 3). *The Paris Wife* and *Z: A Novel of Zelda Fitzgerald* use the character's quest for truth to artistically i.e fictionally express real life experience. The linguistic representation of reality as opposed to the use of the fictitious in the creative process of writing does not cause greater difficulty understanding their overlapping. Nevertheless, both novels have their peculiarities and uniqueness as a result of that merging. They grasp all thematic variations and deliver sound text ready to be claimed by these spheres.

### **Conclusion**

The biographical fictions reveal some of the aesthetic and other choices authors made when rewriting life in fiction. Hemingway and Fitzgerald were the first great celebrities among the American writers. The heightened interest about their private and professional endeavors has not only never stopped but also intensely pondered in every pore of literary, cultural and historical realms of America. It is especially interesting how the authors' glamorous lives escalated during their most intense years in Europe. F.Scott Fitzgerald's life with his dazzling wife Zelda eclipsed by his alpha-male frenemy Ernest Hemingway. (Kevin, USA today: 2015) They provided such ample material for the reporters and the public eye on both sides of the Atlantic. This is proved by the tide of imaginative writing and the writing threatening to simply swamp the distinction between "truth" and imagination, by allowing the question of both fact and fiction remain close to the center of generic expectation of biography and open for possibilities at the same time. Despite that the world doesn't seem to have had enough of them, a never-ending interest. Fiction writers turned Fitzgerald and Hemingway a special brand of material for distinct presentation of their professional and private lives. In some cases as in the books subject to this study, both writers appear in the same novel. Their interrelatedness and their personal lives are multicolored. One of the answer for the interest is the commercial potential of the books. Their appeal is truly universal. They have even found the process irresistible. Their lingering power on our collective imagination is a result of the authors' continuous cultivation into celebrities.

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